

## **CLAIMS**

We claim:

1. A method of processing image data including pixel intensity values comprising the steps of:

5                   selectively smoothing the image data to generate selectively smoothed image data wherein areas characterized as edges within the selectively smoothed image data are essentially preserved;

                  selectively sharpening the selectively smoothed image data using variable contrast stretching.

- 10           2. The method as described in Claim 1 wherein variable contrast stretching is performed by:

                  clipping those pixel intensity values outside of a variable range; and

                  mapping those pixel intensity values within the variable range.

- 15           3. The method as described in Claim 1 wherein the step of selectively smoothing is performed using robust anisotropic diffusion (RAD) filtering.